Model Core Curriculum Project
Lead Team meeting
Oct. 18-19, 2005
Des Moines Botanical Center

Purpose Statement for the Model Core Curriculum Project Lead Team

The purpose of the Project Lead Team is to collaborate with subcommittees in identifying the essential content and skills of a world-class core curriculum and present its findings to the State Board of Education in partial fulfillment of SF 245. The model core curriculum will focus on the areas of literacy, mathematics, and science. The intent of this work is two-fold: 1) to ensure that all Iowa students have access to a rigorous and relevant curriculum to prepare them for success in post-secondary education, the workforce, and the emerging global economy, and 2) to provide a tool for Iowa educators to use to assure that essential subject matter is being taught and essential knowledge and skills are being learned.

October 18, 2005
Present: Timothy Ansley, Shelly Hill for Ray Beets, Linda Berg, Hope Bossard, Sherry Brown, Bill Callahan, Bob Driggs, Steve Goodall, Dale Gruis, Eric Hart, Tony Heiting, Alissa Jourdan, Shirley Kelly, Rita Martens, Kris Mesicek, Mary Jean Montgomery, Susie Olesen, Susan Pecinovsky, Gary Phye, Jim Reese, Tara Richards, LuAnn Richardson, Luanne Schneider, Kristin Steingreaber, Warren Weber
Absent: Diane Crookham Johnson, John Dunkhase, Vicki Goldsmith, Barb Guy, Kathy McKee, Judith Spitzli, Phyllis Staplin

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A team of educators and employers convened in Des Moines on Oct. 18, charged with the task of developing a world-class core curriculum for Iowa's high schools.

From the first moments of the two-day meeting, the emphasis was on students and their needs, not solely on the legislation (Senate File 245) that brought this task force into being. Iowa Department of Education Director Judy Jeffrey set the tone by urging the group to focus on creative ways to put students first. She cited several compelling statistics to buttress the need to make changes now. "We are racing to maintain our competitive edge, not racing to be on top."

Jeffrey noted today's global economy has college graduates flooding out of China and India. These newly minted graduates pack a one-two punch: They are fluent in English and specialize in technical or engineering fields. The explosion in college-educated engineers and technically trained students from the two Asian countries now dwarf the numbers coming from U.S. programs. And Jeffrey noted it is happening at a time when the U.S. Dept. of Labor predicts a 51 percent increase in jobs related to engineering and science between 1988 and 2008. That's an expansion rate four times faster than overall job growth.

Jeffrey advised team members to stay focused on what Iowa needs. Parents want students who are self-sufficient, happy, well-rounded citizens, she said, while employers seek hires armed with the ability to work well in teams, possess strong basic skills and exhibit a good work ethic. Meanwhile, students want acceptance by their peers; they also want to be challenged and motivated to learn.

The task force has a May deadline to complete its curriculum proposal for the state Board of Education and will focus on literacy, mathematics and science. Jeffrey stressed that beyond delivering a report, the task force should strive to ensure that the plan it creates not simply sit on a shelf. Other states have developed standards and assessments resulting in teachers who "teach to the test", she said. But she asked the group to think about the gap between the standards and the assessments – "the rich, challenging curriculum, the curriculum that builds on the knowledge and experiences gained by students as they move through school and life, the curriculum that is the bridge from one grade to the next. School districts are very interested in having guidance on what this looks like," she told the group.

Jeffrey also challenged the team to ensure its plan serves the 50 percent of high school students who do NOT walk in with a vision of going to college. In fact, she said, some wonder if a technical degree - rather than a four-year degree - could be adequate for some career opportunities.

Another key question for the group: When do core curriculum expectations end? At graduation or in 11th or 10th grade?

Jeffrey invited the group to explore additional questions:

- **Review the content and tools teachers are working with**. What is taught? Why is it taught? Is it serving 21st century needs? Those needs include:
    - Basic literacy
    - Civic literacy
    - Economic literacy
    - Thinking critically, analyzing data, embracing new ideas
    - A global awareness, an appreciation of different cultures
- **Inspire and challenge learning**. What do students walk through the door with in understanding how the world works? How can we equip them to take control of their own learning? Rather than having them "power down" when they walk through the schoolhouse door, have them "power up".
- **Determine how core curriculum will look**? Can we create modules that can be dropped into other courses behind language arts, math and science?

Throughout the two days, team members were reminded that they are an advisory group. Work groups will actually draft the core curriculums, to then be reviewed by this oversight group.

A three-person panel of Jeffrey, Brian Rowe of Interpower Corp. and Alissa Jourdan of Kemin Industries talked about the discord between what employers seek in new hires and what students are prepared to do by high school graduation day. The two employer representatives repeatedly talked about the need for students to be able to function in teams, to find satisfaction in helping the overall company mission, and to be attuned to customer service needs. Rowe complained that too many students have an air of entitlement when they interview for jobs. Not only is that off-putting during the interview, but it clashes with the expectation that employees will possess "self-learning" skills on the job.

The panelists also called for more basic changes: improving reading and writing skills, and ensuring that classes are relevant to current events and needs. For this group, a core curriculum must equip high school graduates with essential reading and writing skills, the ability to talk/communicate effectively, critical thinking skills and baseline computer skills.

When asked if other states are outperforming Iowa students, Jourdan said she doubted other *states* were but said other *countries* are.

In Day Two of the first session, task force members received a thorough briefing on demographic and employment trends for Iowa. Among the highlights of the demographic report by Beth Henning, coordinator of the State Data Center of Iowa: The state is a net exporter of college

graduates. Also, the influx of immigrants, many from Mexico, has declined significantly since 9/11/01. So while the state is still growing, it's growing slowly – courtesy of a low birth rate and a cooling pace of immigration.

In the workforce overview by Teresa Taylor, chief of the Labor Market and Economic Research Bureau, she noted that employers are focused heavily on finding candidates with strong *soft* skills. Employers want SWANS – people who are **s**mart, **w**ork hard, are **a**mbitious and **ni**ce. Task force members questioned Taylor about the relatively small numbers of hires projected in high-tech and engineering fields, given the emphasis placed on those fields throughout the two-day discussion. Taylor offered two contributing factors:

- Iowa simply doesn't have as many jobs for four-year engineering/science grads, so we are exporting those talents. The nation as a whole does have a growing need for those areas of expertise.
- Even so-called non-tech jobs have become reliant on technology skills. You can find it interwoven increasingly into all job fields.

Task force members reviewed task forces and efforts that have already plowed some curriculum ground: Iowa Learns 2; Content Networks in math, science and reading; Community Conversations co-hosted by the Department and Education and local school districts last spring, and the High School visits led last spring by Jeffrey. Before the next two-day meeting, the lead team will review those programs more deeply in search of ideas applicable to the curriculum project.

As Day Two moved toward a close, the lead team broke into three subgroups to develop guidelines for the three curriculum work teams, who begin work in November.

Next meeting for the lead team: Nov. 14-15, 2005